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TAGS: ELAB PGOV PREL SOCI ASEC GV
SUBJECT: UNION LEADER SAYS CONSSTITUTION FIRST, THEN ELECTIONS

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF SHANNON CAZEAU FOR REASON 1.4 B AND D

¶11. (C) SUMMARY. Now that the long anticipated coup has taken place, union leader Rabiatou is looking to create an effective civilian coalition that can check the military junta's power until elections can be organized. However, Rabiatou appears to be in no hurry to get to elections, arguing that the first priority should be to rewrite the Guinean constitution. She acknowledged international condemnations of the coup, but pleaded for strong international leadership in the months ahead in order to help Guinea emerge from its political and social crisis, and to "avoid the mistakes of the past." Although Rabiatou talked about civil unity, this is a goal that has proven elusive in the past due to political infighting, personal ambitions, corruption, and manipulations based on ethnic ties. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) Poloff met with Rabiatou Serah Diallo, co-chair of the Unions Intersyndicale, an umbrella coalition of Guinea's labor unions, on December 31. Shortly after the December 23 coup, the unions publicly accepted the installation of the Council for Democracy and Development (CNDD) and expressed their willingness to work with the new government in order to organize elections and a peaceful transition to civilian rule. One of the CNDD's first acts was to ban all political and union activity, a decree that has not yet been officially lifted. In past meetings with Poloff, Rabiatou has repeatedly advocated in favor of a coup d'etat as the country's only available mechanism for effecting a peaceful political transition.

COUP WAS EXPECTED AND NECESSARY

¶13. (C) Rabiatou asserted that the coup was exactly what the Guinean population had been expecting. "If the military had not immediately stepped in to take power, we would have had an ethnic conflict," she said. Rabiatou told Poloff that the international condemnations were also expected, but that she hopes that bilateral partners will be flexible in terms of their policies as the new government moves forward. "The Guinean case is special and everyone needs to take that into consideration," she said. Rabiatou argued that any international sanctions would have no impact on the government itself, but only penalize the general population "who have already suffered enough."

¶14. (C) According to Rabiatou, it is not yet apparent that the power struggle is over. She said that there are several groups actively considering a counter-coup. "International sanctions would only empower these groups, leaving us to go from coup to coup...and I do not know where we will end up if that is the case," she told Poloff. Later in the discussion,

Rabiataou said that no one is sure who is propping up the CNDD, but said that former President Conte's family may be providing support behind the scenes. Again mentioning the other groups maneuvering for power, Rabiataou said that opposition leader Alpha Conde is backing one of these groups.

(COMMENT. Alpha Conde heads the Rally for the Guinean People political party, which is predominantly Malinke. END COMMENT).

URGING BROADER CIVILIAN REPRESENTATION

¶15. (SBU) Commenting on union discussions with the CNDD, Rabiataou said that the unions are urging the CNDD to broaden its representation by enlarging the Council with a higher number of civilian members. She said that the unions had met with the CNDD on December 30 and asserted that the Council "must be a neutral organ of transition."

CONSTITUTION FIRST, THEN ELECTIONS

¶16. (SBU) Rabiataou emphasized that before the country can move toward elections, it is imperative that Guineans draft a new constitution. "We need to revise the constitution and then hold a national referendum. After we do that, we can hold all the elections at the same time, presidential, legislative, and local," she said. According to Rabiataou, if the Conte regime were still in place, the elections "would have never happened on May 31." She told Poloff that progress was slow because no one was truly committed to holding elections. Rabiataou said that the people no longer have confidence in any of their political leaders, saying

HELPING THE CNDD MOVE FORWARD

¶17. (SBU) At the same time, Rabiataou said that the international community should be focused on "reinforcing the CNDD." She said that the new government needs to complete financial audits in order to weed out corrupt former officials. "We need a complete moral investigation...we need to help citizens make a good choice," she said. Rabiataou emphasized that failure to address the corruption and constitutional issues would leave the country in the same situation it has been for the last fifty years, regardless of whether or not elections move forward.

¶18. (C) Rabiataou said that she is concerned about the CNDD leadership, and that only broader civil representation and assistance from the international donor community could neutralize the military junta. She said that President Camara has been making many promises, but that some of his actions to date contradict his political statements. She pointed out that the CNDD nominated the prime minister on December 29, claiming that the PM would be the head of government with all the powers of the position, but then began nominating ministers before the new PM's plane had even landed in country. (COMMENT. The only ministers who have been officially named are the ministers of defense and security, both of which are temporary appointments. Two other ministers were named on December 29, including the minister of finance, but later retractions leave some doubt as to whether other appointments were or were not made. END COMMENT).

REACHING OUT TO CIVIL SOCIETY

¶19. (SBU) When asked about the unions' political strategy, Rabiataou said that the labor unions had already established three commissions within their ranks, which will focus on social issues, the constitution, and public relations. "The CNDD cannot suspend union activities...we are not going to just sit on our hands; if necessary, we will denounce the

government," she said.

¶10. (SBU) Rabiatou said that the unions have also been meeting with other civil society leaders, including opposition political parties. She claims that all agree that the constitution needs to be amended. In addition, Rabiatou said she is advocating in favor of reducing the number of political parties from the more than 50 currently, to either two or four parties. "We cannot have just three parties because then they will only be ethnic, representing the Malinkes, Soussous, and Peuhls; two or four parties forces ethnic groups to build interethnic coalitions," she told Poloff. Rabiatou said that many leaders are in favor of this proposal, including opposition leaders Sidya Toure and Cellou Diallo. However, she said that although Alpha Conde agrees, he thinks the timing is wrong because political parties are not yet ready to consolidate.

FAVORABLE REACTION TO THE NEW PM

¶11. (SBU) When asked about the new prime minister, Rabiatou said that Kabine Komara is a good choice, and that he was one of the names the unions put forward to lead the consensus government after the 2007 labor strikes. "We cannot confirm his sincerity...we need to be cautious, but we are content with the decision," she said.

CALLING ON THE "THIRD FORCE"

¶12. (SBU) Making a case for international leadership, Rabiatou said that Guineans need "a third force" in order to emerge from the political and social crisis of the last fifty years. She noted that although the CNDD seems to be saying all the right things, so did former President Conte in 1984. Rabiatou added that Conte had effectively "nourished the roots of conflict," referring to manipulations based on money and ethnicity, and that Guinea is still very much in danger of descending into violent conflict. "I am afraid," she told Poloff.

COMMENT

¶13. (C) Although she clearly had misgivings about the new government, Rabiatou stressed that the coup was what was needed to move the country forward. She seemed to be counting on international pressure to reinforce civilian efforts to keep the CNDD from reneging on its promise to cede power to a democratically elected civilian government. However, Rabiatou's comments suggest that she is no hurry to have elections. Her priority is to "fix" the constitution in order to avoid electing a new government that will only perpetuate the problems of the past. Part of this approach may stem from the unions' distrust of the opposition political parties, which is tied to the unions' growing political influence over the past few years, and union demands to change the constitution to allow independent candidates to run in elections.

¶14. (C) Rabiatou seemed focused on trying to unify various civil society actors, including opposition political leaders, in order to provide an effective civil balance to the military junta. However, personal political ambitions, money, and ethnicity have thwarted similar efforts in the past. With power at stake, these problems may continue to play a divisive role, and may hinder civil society efforts to coalesce in a meaningful way. END COMMENT.

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